

Message Text

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14

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

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R 100743Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1943

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 1673

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, TS, LY, EG

SUBJ:MOHAMED MASMOUDI ARRESTED IN CAIRO

1. TUNIS NEWS MEDIA REPORTED MARCH 8 THAT FORMER GOT FOREIGN MINISTER MOHAMED MASMOUDI HAD BEEN ARRESTED BY EGYPTIAN SECURITY AUTHORITIES IN CAIRO MARCH 4, HELD FOR QUESTIONING, AND RELEASED ON MARCH 8. DRAWING ON UPI, AFP, AND MENA DISPATCHES, TUNIS AFRIQUE PRESSE (TAP) REPORTED THAT MASMOUDI WAS HELD IN CONNECTION WITH ARREST OF SEVEN MEMBERS OF THE 219TH AND 130TH REGIMENTS OF THE LIBYAN ARMY ATTACHED TO THE LIBYAN PRESIDENCY. ACCORDING TO THE REPORT, THESE SEVEN WERE IN EGYPT TO KIDNAP OR ASSASSINATE OMAR MUHEISHI. MASMOUDI ARREST WAS FURTHER CONNECTED TO CAPTURE IN ROME OF THREE LIBYANS WHO INTENDED TO CARRY OUT A SIMILAR OPERATION AGAINST LIBYAN FOREIGN MINISTER AL-HUNI. MASMOUDI HAD SOUGHT, ON BEHALF OF LARG, TO INDUCE MUHEISHI TO RETURN TO LIBYA. HE FAILED, AND LARG REPORTEDLY FOLLOWED UP WITH KIDNAP/ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS. MASMOUDI WAS ABOUT TO DEPART FOR PARIS WHEN

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HE WAS ARRESTED. EGYPTIAN NEWS RELEASE NOTED THAT MASMOUDI

HAD BEEN EXPELLED FROM DESTOURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY.

2. TUNISIAN PRESS TREATMENT OF MASMOUDI ARREST WAS RELATIVELY LOW KEY, RELYING ENTIRELY ON FOREIGN NEWS SOURCES. SOLE EDITORIAL COMMENT THUS FAR HAS APPEARED IN INDEPENDENT LE TEMPS WHICH SARCASTICALLY CALLED MASMOUDI "MR. GOOD OFFICES" AND SAID THAT CONSIDERING HIS PRONOUNCED TASTE FOR THIS ROLE DURING HIS PREVIOUS "ECLIPSES" IN TUNISIAN POLITICS, ONE IS NOT SURPRISED BY THE "MISSION" WITH WHICH HE SAW HIMSELF ENTRUSTED IN CAIRO. THE GOT HAS NOT YET COMMENTED ON THE INCIDENT.

3. AFTER THE MASMOUDI-SIRED UNITY DECLARATION BETWEEN LIBYA AND TUNISIA WAS ABORTED IN JANUARY 1974, THE EX-FOREIGN MINISTER'S WIDE-RANGING ACTIVITIES IN ARAB AFFAIRS AND HIS TOYING WITH THE ROLE OF "OPPOSITION POLITICIAN" APPEARED TO HAVE PROVOKED AN UNMENDABLE SPLIT BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE GOT. THIS SPLIT, HOWEVER, SEEMED ON THE MEND IN MID-1975 AND RUMORS WIDELY CIRCULATED IN TUNIS IN AUGUST THAT THERE HAD BEEN A RECONCILIATION. MORE RECENTLY, MASMOUDI, AS WELL AS OTHER TUNISIANS CURRENTLY IN DISFAVOR, WAS RUMORED TO BE IN LINE FOR PARDON OF POLITICAL OFFENSES DURING THE CELEBRATION OF TUNISIA'S TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY ON MARCH 20. MASMOUDI'S INVOLVEMENT IN LARG SPONSORED KIDNAP/ASSASSINATION SCHEMES, HOWEVER, CASTS DOUBT ON THIS AND CERTAINLY MUST RAISE IN MINDS OF GOT LEADERS THE QUESTION OF WHAT HE IS UP TO.
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